

Critique of Economic Reason: Summary for Trade Unionists and Other Left Activists

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THE CRISIS OF WORK

1.1. The Ideology of Work

Work for economic ends has not always been the dominant activity of mankind. It has only been dominant across the whole of society since the advent of industrial capitalism, about two hundred years ago. Before capitalism, people in pre-modern societies, in the Middle Ages and the Ancient World, worked far less than they do nowadays, as they do in the precapitalist societies that still exist today. In fact, the difference was such that the first industrialists, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, had great difficulty getting their workforce to do a full day's work, week in week out. The first factory bosses went bankrupt precisely for this reason.

That is to say that what the British and the Germans call 'the work ethic' and the 'work-based society' are recent phenomena.

It is a feature of 'work-based societies' that they consider work as at one and the same time a moral duty, a social obligation and the route to personal success. The ideology of work assumes that,

- the more each individual works, the better off everyone will be;
- those who work little or not at all are acting against the interests of the community as a whole and do not deserve to be members of it;
- those who work hard achieve social success and those who do not succeed have only themselves to blame.

This ideology is still deeply ingrained and hardly a day passes without some politician, be he Right - or left-wing, urging us to work and insisting that work is the only way to solve the present crisis. If we are to 'beat unemployment', they add, we must work more, not less.

1.2. The Crisis of the Work Ethic

In actual fact the work ethic has become obsolete. It is no longer true that producing more means working more, or that producing more will lead to a better way of life.

The connection between more and better has been broken; our needs for many products and services are already more than adequately met, and many of our as-yet-unsatisfied needs will be met not by producing more, but by producing differently, producing other things, or even producing less. This is especially true as regards our needs for air, water, space, silence, beauty, time and human contact.

Neither is it true any longer that the more each individual works, the better off everyone will be. The present crisis has stimulated technological change of an unprecedented scale and speed: 'the micro-chip revolution'. The object and indeed the effect of this revolution has been to make rapidly increasing savings in labour, in the industrial, administrative and service sectors. *Increasing production is secured in these sectors by decreasing amounts of labour.* As a result, the social process of production no longer needs everyone to work in it on a full-time basis. The work ethic ceases to be viable in such a situation and workbased society is thrown into crisis.

1.3. The Neo-conservative Ideology of Hard Work

Not everyone is aware of this crisis. Some are aware of it but find it in their interest to deny its existence. This is true, in particular, of a large number of 'neo-conservatives', bent on upholding the ideology of work in a context in which paid work is becoming increasingly scarce. They thus encourage people looking for paid work to enter into increasingly fierce competition with each other, relying on this competition to bring down the cost of labour (that is, wages) and allow the 'strong' to eliminate the 'weak'. They look to this neoDarwinian process of the 'survival of the fittest' to bring about the rebirth of a dynamic form of capitalism, with all its blemishes removed together with all or part of its social legislation.

1.4. Working Less so that Everyone can Work

It is in the common interest of waged workers not to compete with one other, to organize a united response to their employers and collectively negotiate their conditions of employment with the latter. This common interest finds its expression in trade unionism.

In a context in which there is not enough paid full-time work to go round, abandoning the work ethic becomes a condition of survival for the trade-union movement. To do so is no betrayal on the movement's part. The liberation *from* work and the idea of 'working less so everyone can work' were, after all, at the origin of the struggle of the labour movement.

1.5. Forms of Work

By work we have come to understand a paid activity, performed on behalf of a third party (the employer), to achieve goals we have not chosen for ourselves and

according to procedures and schedules laid down by the person paying our wages. There is widespread confusion between 'work' and 'job' or 'employment', as there is between the 'right to work', the 'right to a wage' and the 'right to an income'.

Now, in practice, not all activities constitute work, and neither is all work paid or done with payment in mind. We have to distinguish between three types of work.

1.5.1. *Work for economic ends*

This is work done *with payment in mind*. Here money, that is, *commodity exchange*, is the principal goal. One works first of all to 'earn a living', and the satisfaction or pleasure one may possibly derive from such work is a subordinate consideration. This may be termed -work for *economic ends*.

1.5.2. *Domestic labour and work-for-oneself*

This is work done not with a view to exchange but in order to achieve *a result* of which one is, directly, the principal beneficiary. 'Reproductive' work, that is, domestic labour, which guarantees the basic and immediate necessities of life day after day - preparing food, keeping oneself and one's home clean, giving birth to children and bringing them up, and so on - is an example of this kind of work. It was and still is often the case that women are made to do such work on top of the work they do for economic ends.

Since the domestic community (the nuclear or extended family) is one in which life is based on *sharing everything* rather than on an accounting calculation and commodity exchange, it is only recently that the idea of wages for housework has arisen. Previously, by contrast, domestic labour was seen as work done *by and for* the domestic community as a whole. This attitude, it should be stressed, is only justifiable if all the members of the domestic community share the tasks equitably. A number of activists have called for women to be given wages for housework in the form of a public allowance, in recognition of the social utility of such work. But this will not lead to the equitable sharing of household chores and moreover it poses the following problems:

- it transforms domestic labour into work for economic ends, that is, into a domestic (servant's) job;
- it places domestic labour in the same category as *socially useful* work, whereas its aim is - and should be - not social utility but the well-being and personal fulfilment of the members of the community, which is not at all the same thing. The confusion between the fulfilment of individuals and their social utility stems from a totalitarian conception of society in which there is no place for the uniqueness and singularity of the individual or for the specificity of the private sphere. *By nature* this sphere is - and should be - exempt from social control and the criteria of public utility.

1.5.3. *Autonomous activity*

Autonomous activities are activities one performs freely and not from necessity, as ends in themselves. This includes all activities which are experienced as fulfilling, enriching, sources of meaning and happiness: artistic, philosophical, scientific, relational, educational, charitable and mutual-aid activities, activities of auto-production, and so on. All these activities require 'work' in the sense that they require effort and methodical application but their meaning lies as much in their performance as in their product: activities such as these are the substance of life itself. But this always requires there to be no shortage of time. Indeed, the same activity - bringing up children, preparing a meal or taking care of our surroundings, for example - can take the form of a chore in which one is subject to what seem like oppressive constraints or of a gratifying activity, depending on whether one is harassed by lack of time or whether the activity can be performed at leisure, in co-operation with others and through the voluntary sharing of the tasks involved.

1.6. **The End of Utopia**

The progressive domination of work for economic ends was only made possible by the advent of capitalism and the generalization of commodity exchange. We owe to it in particular the destruction of a great deal of non-commodity services and exchanges and domestic production in which work for economic ends and the pleasure of creating something of beauty were inextricably linked. This explains why the labour movement originally challenged the overriding importance industrial capitalism attached to waged work and economic ends. However, in calling for the abolition of wage labour and for the government or selfgovernment of society by freely associated workers in control of the means of production, the demands of the workers ran directly counter to the developments that were actually taking place. The movement was utopian in so far as the possibility of giving substance to its demands had not emerged.

Yet what was utopian in the early nineteenth century has ceased in part to be so today: the economy and the social process of production require decreasing quantities of wage labour. The subordination of all other human activities and goals to waged work, for economic ends is ceasing to be either necessary or meaningful. Emancipation from economic and commercial rationality is becoming a possibility, but it can only become reality through actions which also demonstrate its feasibility. Cultural action and the development of 'alternative activities' take on particular significance in this context. I shall return to this point below.

CRISIS OF WORK, CRISIS OF SOCIETY

2.1. Giving Meaning to the Changes: The Liberation of Time

Trade unionism cannot continue to exist as a *movement* with a future unless it expands its mission beyond the defence of the particular interests of waged workers. In industry, as in the classical tertiary sector, we are witnessing an increasingly accelerated reduction in the amount of labour required. The German trade-union movement has estimated that, of the new forms of technology which will be available by the year 2000, only 5 per cent are currently being put to use. The reserves of productivity (that is, foreseeable labour savings) in the industrial and classical tertiary sectors are immense.

The liberation *from* work for economic ends, through reductions in working hours and the development of other types of activities, self-regulated and self-determined by the individuals involved, is the only way to give positive meaning to the savings in wage labour brought about by the current technological revolution. The project for a society of liberated time, in which everyone will be able to work but will work less and less for economic ends, is the *possible meaning* of the current historical developments. Such a project is able to give cohesion and a unifying perspective to the different elements that make up the social movement since (1) it is a logical extension of the experiences and struggles of workers in the past; (2) it reaches beyond that experience and those struggles towards objectives which correspond to the interests of both workers and non-workers, and is thus able to cement bonds of solidarity and common political will between them; (3) it corresponds to the aspirations of the ever-growing proportion of men and women who wish to (re)gain control in and of their own lives.

2.2. Regaining Control Over One's Life

Workplace struggles have not lost any of their significance but the labour movement cannot afford to ignore the fact that other struggles, in other areas, are becoming increasingly important as far as the future of society and our regaining control over our own lives is concerned. In particular, the labour movement's campaign for a reduction in working hours cannot ignore the fact that the unpaid work done by women in the private sphere can be as hard as the labour which men and women have to put up with to earn their living. The campaign for a shortening of working hours must, then, go hand in hand with a new and equitable distribution of paid work amongst all those who wish to work, and for an equitable redistribution of the unpaid tasks of the domestic sphere. The trade-union movement cannot be indifferent to the specific women's movement campaigns on these questions and it must take these into account when

determining its own courses of action, especially with respect to the arrangement and self-management of work schedules.

Nor can the trade-union movement be indifferent to people's campaigns against the invasion of their environment by mega-technological systems which upset or destroy the environment and subject vast regions and their populations to unchecked technocratic control, so as to meet logistical or safety requirements.

The right of individuals to sovereign control over their own lives and ways of cooperating with others suffers no exception. It cannot be gained in the field of work and work relations at the expense of struggles going on in other fields, any more than it can be gained in these other fields at the expense of labour struggles.

2.3. Towards 50 per cent Marginalization

A progressive wide-scale reduction in working hours without loss of income is the necessary (though not sufficient, as I will go on to explain) condition for the redistribution of paid work amongst all those who wish to work; and for an equitable redistribution of the unpaid work in the private sphere. Everyone must therefore be able to work less so that everyone can lead a better life and earn their living by working. This is the only way the trend towards an increasingly deep division of society, the segmentation of the labour market and the marginalization of a growing percentage of the population can be checked and then reversed.

According to a study by Wolfgang Lecher, of the WSI (the Institute of Economic and Social Research of the DGB), the continuation of the present trend would lead, within the next ten years or so, to the following segmentation of the active population:

- 25 per cent will be skilled workers with permanent jobs in large firms protected by collective wage agreements;
- 25 per cent will be peripheral workers with insecure, unskilled and badly-paid jobs, whose work schedules vary according to the wishes of their employers and the fluctuations in the market;
- 50 per cent will be semi-unemployed, unemployed, marginalized workers, doing occasional or seasonal work and 'odd jobs'. Already 51 per cent of the active population in France aged between 18 and 24 fit into this category (26 per cent unemployed, 25 per cent doing 'odd jobs'); and the percentage is even higher in Italy, Spain, the Netherlands and (especially) Britain.

2.4. The New Domestic Servants

The Right acknowledges and accepts the direction in which these developments are going. A new employers' ideology, the so-called ideology of 'human resources', is seeking to integrate the stable core of permanent skilled workers into modern enterprises which are portrayed as 'sites of intellectual and personal fulfilment', whilst advocating 'modest jobs' for a 'modest wage' in service enterprises, particularly 'person to person' services, for the rest.

In the United States, which is often taken as a model, of the thirteen to fifteen million new jobs created in the last ten years, the majority are in the personal-service sector and are very often insecure, badly paid and offer no possibilities of achieving professional qualifications or advancement - jobs as caretakers, nightwatchmen, cleaners, waiters and waitresses, staff in 'fast food' restaurants, nursing assistants, deliverymen/women, street sellers, shoeshiners, and so on.

These 'person-to-person' services are, in reality, the jobs of *domestic or personal servants* in their modernized and Socialized guise. A French minister for social affairs acknowledged this fact when he suggested there should be tax incentives to encourage people to employ domestic servants.

This shows a striking parallel with the developments which took place during the last century when the introduction of intensive farming and the mechanization of the textile industry led to millions of unemployed people going into domestic service: 'personal and domestic servants' represented 14 per cent of the working population in Britain between 1851 and 1911. It is quite likely that 'person-to-person' services - and this includes jobs in massage and relaxation salons, therapy groups and psychological counselling bureaux, for example - today represent more than 14 per cent of the United States' working population.

As in the colonies in the past and many Third World countries today, a growing mass of people in the industrialized countries has been reduced to fighting each other for the 'privilege' of selling their personal services to those who still maintain a decent income.

2.5. The Dangers of Trade-Union Neo-corporatism

As a result of all this, a new dividing line is cutting across class barriers, a fact commented on by Wolfgang Lecher in the study quoted above:

The opposition between labour and capital is increasingly coming to be overlaid by an antagonism between workers in permanent, wellprotected jobs on the one hand and on the other. . The trade unions run the risk of degenerating into a sort of mutual insurance for the relatively restricted and privileged group of permanent workers.

If they see their sole task as that of defending the interests of those with stable jobs, the trade unions run the risk of degenerating into a neocorporatist, conservative force, as has occurred in a number of countries in Latin America.

The task of the trade-union movement, if it wishes to survive and grow as a movement promoting individual and social liberation, must, therefore, be to extend its sphere of action beyond the limited defence of workers as workers, in their workplaces, much more clearly than it has done in the past. Trade unions will only avoid becoming a sectionalist, neo-corporatist force if the segmentation of society and the marginalization of a growing percentage of the population can be prevented. If this is to happen, an ambitious policy for a continual, programmed reduction in working hours is indispensable. Trade unions are incapable of implementing such a policy on their own. But through their campaigns they can ensure that the necessity for such a policy is accepted and, more importantly, they can adopt it as the objective governing their actions and their social project. A project for a society in which each can work less so that all can work better and live more becomes, today, one of the principal binding elements of social cohesion.

It still remains for us to examine: (1) the extent of the reduction in working hours that can be envisaged; (2) the cultural changes and cultural tasks which trade unions will have to tackle as a result; (3) the changes it will bring about in the life of individual people; (4) how it can be programmed, realized and made compatible with an improvement in our standard of living.

WORKING LESS SO THAT ALL CAN WORK

3.1. Towards the 1,000-hour Working Year

The current technological revolution is giving rise to savings in labour, the extent of which are often underestimated. Productivity in industry has risen between 5 per cent and 6 per cent per year since 1978; in the economy as a whole it has risen by between 3 per cent and 4 per cent per year. Production of commercial goods and services has risen by about 2 per cent per year. In other words, though the economy keeps growing, the amount of labour it requires diminishes every year by approximately 2 per cent.

This *net saving in labour* is set to accelerate between now and the end of the century, thanks, mainly, to the improvements that can be predicted in robotics and information technology. Yet even without any acceleration, the amount of labour required by the economy will have diminished in the next ten years by about 22 per cent; in the next fifteen years it will have diminished by about a third.

The prospects from now until the beginning of the next century are therefore as follows: either current norms of full-time employment will be maintained and there will be another 35 per cent of the population unemployed on top of the current 10 per cent to 20 per cent; or else the number of hours spent in work for economic ends will be reduced in proportion to foreseeable savings in labour and the number of hours we work will decrease by between 30 per cent and 40 per cent - or even by half if everyone is to be guaranteed paid work. Evidently intermediate solutions can be envisaged, but the optimum solution is obviously the one which allows everyone to work but work less, work better and receive *their share of the growing socially produced wealth in the form of an increasing real income*. This presupposes a staged, programmed reduction in working hours from approximately 1,000 hours per year at present to approximately 1,000 hours per year in fifteen years' time, without any reduction in people's purchasing power. This calls for a whole series of specific policies, in particular a social policy which will make purchasing power dependent not on the amount of working hours put in but on the amount of social wealth produced. We will return to this later.

3.2. New Values, New Tasks

For the first time in modern history, *we will be able to stop spending most of our time and our lives doing paid work*. The liberation from work has become, for the first time, a tangible prospect. However, we must not underestimate the implications this has for each of us. The campaign for a continual and substantial reduction in the amount of paid work we do presupposes the latter's gradually ceasing to be the only - or main - occupation in our lives. It must, then, cease to be our principal source of identity and social insertion. Values other than economic values, activities other than the functional, instrumental, waged activities social apparatuses and institutions compel us to perform, will have to become predominant in our lives.

The cultural and societal change involved here demands from each of us a change in attitude which no state, government, political party or trade union can bring about on our behalf. We shall have to find a meaning in life other than gainful employment, the work ethic and productivity, and struggles centred on issues other than those implied in wage relations. The extent of these cultural changes is such that it would be futile to propose them *were it not for the fact that the changes presently under way are already heading in this direction*.

3.2.1. *Liberation in work and liberation from work*

Disaffection with waged work has been on the increase over the last twenty years or so, as shown by surveys conducted periodically by institutes in Germany and Sweden. Particularly prevalent among young workers, this attitude finds expression not so much in a lack of interest or a refusal to work hard but rather in a desire that work should fit into life instead of life having to fit into or be

sacrificed to one's job or career. Workers, particularly young workers, aspire to (re)gain control of their lives and this increases their awareness of and openness to movements which have this specific aim.

This desire to liberate oneself from, or vis-a-vis, work should not be seen as opposed to the traditional union objectives of achieving liberation *in* work. On the contrary, past experience has shown that workers become more demanding with regard to their working conditions and work relations when their work leaves them time and energy to have a personal life. Conversely, personal self-development requires that the nature and hours of work should not be damaging to the workers' physical and psychic faculties. The trade-union movement must, therefore, keep campaigning on two levels simultaneously, just as it did in the past: for the 'humanization' and enrichment of work and for a reduction in working hours, without loss of income.

The traditional task of the trade unions is as relevant now as ever. For although the employers' ideology sets great store by the reskilling and personalizing of jobs and the policy of giving workers greater responsibility, in practice this revaluation of labour only affects a small and privileged elite.

For large sectors of industrial and service workers it entails not only redundancies, but the deskilling and standardization of numerous previously skilled jobs and the introduction of a system of constant electronic monitoring of behaviour and productivity. Instead of being liberating, computerization often intensifies labour by eliminating 'dead time' and forcing an increase in the pace of work.

Often accompanied by putting workers on short time or the introduction of flexi-time, this intensification of work masks, as if by design, the fact that the intensity of human effort is now just a *secondary factor* of increased productivity, the main factor being the savings in human labour due to the high technical performance of the equipment employed. This equipment *could* be used to ease the strain and monotony of work, as well as working hours. This fact makes the arbitrary and oppressive nature of the intensification of labour all the more acutely felt.

3.2.2. *New forms of work, new responsibilities*

In general, labour is tending to become a secondary force of production by comparison with the power, degree of automation and complexity of the equipment involved. Jobs in which the notion of individual effort and output still retain some meaning, in which the quantity or quality of the product depends on the workers' application to their task and in which their pride in producing something well-made is still a source of personal and social identity, are becoming increasingly rare.

In robotized factories and process industries in particular, work consists essentially in monitoring, (re)programming and, should the occasion arise,

correcting and repairing the functioning of automatic systems. Workers in this situation are *on duty* rather than *at work*. Their work is by nature intermittent. It is as dematerialized and functional to the system whose smooth running it ensures as that of 'functionaries' or civil servants and, as in the case of the latter, often requires the worker to respect procedures whose minutest details have been laid down in advance and which preclude all forms of initiative and creativity. The control the workers exercise over their 'product' and over the purpose it serves is minimal. Traditional work values and the traditional work ethic thus seem destined to give way to an ethic of service and, possibly, of responsibility towards the community, in so far as one's professional consciousness can now only consist in identifying oneself with the value of the *function* one fulfils and no longer with the value of the *product* of one's labour.

It thus becomes essential to ask ourselves what purpose we serve by the function we fulfil at 'work'. Professional consciousness must therefore extend to include an examination of the effects technological, economic and commercial decisions have on society and civilization, and the issues that are at stake. This is especially necessary in the case of technical and scientific workers, whose associations and groups have been known publicly to question the moral and political aims, values and consequences of the programmes they are to implement.

This broadening of professional consciousness, this assumption of a reflexive and critical perspective on the implications of one's professional activities can obviously occur in associations and discussion groups, but should also be a central concern of the trade-union movement. In the absence of such developments, we run the risk of seeing the emergence of a technocratic caste which uses its expertise, or allows others to use it, to reinforce the domination of big business and the state over its citizens.

At a time when the economy has less and less need for everyone to be in full-time employment, the question of why we work and what our work consists in doing assumes prime importance. Asking this question is our only way of protecting ourselves from an ethic of 'hard work for its own sake' and 'producing for the sake of producing' which in the end lead towards an acceptance of the war economy and war itself.

3.2.3. *The importance of non-economic aims and actions*

The capitalist economy is no longer able to guarantee everyone a right to economically useful and remunerated work. Hence the right to work cannot be guaranteed for everyone unless, first, the number of hours everyone works *in the economy* is reduced and, second, the possibilities of working *outside the economy*, in tasks not performed for economic ends, are developed and opened up to all.

3.2.3.1. *The trade union in everyday life: cultural tasks.*

As has been shown, we cannot all be guaranteed the possibility of working within the economy unless working hours are reduced to approximately 1,000 hours per year. *Waged* work cannot then continue to be the most important element in our lives. Unless people are to become passive consumers of amusements, who are fed on and manipulated by a deluge of programmes, messages and media games, they must be given the possibility of developing interests and autonomous activities, including productive activities. Their socialization, that is, their insertion into society and their sense of belonging to a culture, will derive more from these autonomous activities than from the work an employer or institution defines for them. (The same remarks would also apply, should society prefer to have a mass of reasonably well-compensated people out of work rather than reduce working hours). The labour movement should not forget here that its origins lie in working-class cultural associations. It will not be able to survive as a movement unless it takes an interest in people's self-realization outside their work as well as in it, and helps or participates in the creation of sites and spaces in which people are able to develop their ability to take responsibility for their own lives and self-manage their social relations: open universities, community schools and community centres; service-exchange co-operatives and mutual-aid groups; cooperative repair and self-production workshops; discussion, skills-transfer and art and craft groups, and so on.

These are not tasks to be undertaken at some time in the distant future but objectives which should be given urgent priority now, for two reasons.

- The tendency of large-scale enterprises to sub-contract the maximum amount of manufacturing and services out to tiny enterprises employing an unstable, fluctuating workforce, or even people working from home, means it is essential that trade unions should exist in towns and suburbs and that they should be open to all who live in them. They must attract this floating workforce and the population as a whole, independently of their ability to organize waged workers at their workplaces.
- More than at any other time, the influence of the trade-union movement depends on its ability to contend with the cultural industry and the entertainment or leisure moguls, so as to break the monopoly they are aiming to acquire over consciousness-formation and our conception of future society, life and its priorities. The trade-union movement's cultural task is really a political one, if we give 'political' its original meaning of an activity relating to the organization, future and good of the 'city'.

3.2.3.2. *Trade unionism as one movement among many* The trade union movement should also not ignore the Struggles which have developed in the last fifteen years or so in areas outside work. These campaigns, which are extremely varied in nature, are all characterized by the aspiration of individuals and communities to regain existential sovereignty and the power to determine their own lives. These campaigns have a common target: the dictatorial rule industry and the bureaucracy exercise in alliance with professions whose aim it is to monopolize knowledge in areas as diverse as health, education, energy requirements, town planning, the model and level of consumption, and so on. In all these areas, single-issue movements - the 'new social movements' - are attempting to defend our right to self determination from forms of mega-technology and scientism which lead to the concentration of decision-making power in the hands of a technocracy whose expertise generally serves to legitimate the economic and political powers-that-be.

These campaigns of resistance to the professionalization, technocratization and monetarization of our lives are specific forms of a wider, more fundamental struggle for emancipation. They contain a radical potential which has repercussions on workplace struggles and they mould the consciousness of a growing number of people. It is essential for the trade-union movement to be receptive to the aspirations contained within these movements and to adopt them as part of its struggle. It is equally essential that it should see itself as an integral part of a wider, many-sided movement of individual and social emancipation. The fact that the trade-union movement is - and will remain - the best-organized force in this broader movement confers on it a particular responsibility: on it will largely depend the success or failure of all the other elements in this social movement. According to whether the trade-union movement opposes them or whether it seeks a common alliance and a common course of action with them, these other elements will be part of the left or will break with it, will engage with it in collective action or will remain minorities tempted to resort to violence.

The attitude of the trade-union movement towards the other social movements and their objectives will also determine its own evolution. If it divorces itself from them, if it refuses to be part of a wider movement, if it sees its mission as being limited to the defence of waged workers as such, it will inevitably degenerate into a conservative, neo-corporatist force.

3.3. Working Less, Living Better

3.3.1. The field of autonomous activities

A progressive reduction in working time to 1,000 hours or less per year gives completely new dimensions to disposable time. Non-working time is no longer necessarily time for the rest, recuperation, amusement and consumption; it no

longer serves to *compensate* for the strain, constraints and frustrations of working time. Free time is no longer merely the always insufficient 'time left over' we have to make the most of while we can and which is never long enough for embarking on a project of any kind.

If the working week were reduced to under twenty-five or thirty hours, we *could* fill our disposable time with activities which have no economic objective and which enrich the life of both individual and group: cultural and aesthetic activities whose aim is to give and create pleasure and enhance and 'cultivate' our immediate environment; assistance, caring and mutual-aid activities which create a network of social relations and forms of solidarity throughout the neighbourhood or locality; the development of friendships and affective relationships; educational and artistic activities; the repairing and production of objects and growing food for our own use, 'for the pleasure' of making something ourselves, of preserving things we can cherish and hand down to our children; service-exchange cooperatives, and so on. In this way it will be possible for an appreciable proportion of the services currently provided by professionals, commercial enterprises or public institutions to be provided on a voluntary basis by individuals themselves, as members of grassroots communities, according to needs they themselves have defined. I shall return to this later.

These activities, taken as a whole, should not be viewed as an *alternative economic* sector which forms part of a 'dual economy'. These activities are characterized by an absence of economic rationality and have no place in the economic sphere. The act of performing them, is not the *means* to achieve an end, to achieve satisfaction. It produces that satisfaction itself; it is an end in itself. The time we devote, for example, to music, love, education, exchanging of ideas, to creative activities, to looking after the sick, is time for living, and cannot be bought or sold at any price. Extending this time for living and reducing the amount of time devoted to necessary tasks or work for economic ends has been one of humanity's constant aims.

3.3.2. *From the self-management of time to the self-management of life*

There is no reason why we should make this reduction of the amount of paid work a reduction in daily or weekly working hours. Computerization and the greater flexibility of decentralized units of production increase the scope for individual and/or collective self-management of work schedules. This is already happening in Quebec, where public employees are able to arrange their monthly quota of 140 hours as best suits them individually. Factories and administrative bodies have been reorganized so that employees are no longer obliged to put in a set number of hours per day, with work stations functioning independently of one another. Such possibilities for workers themselves to manage their own time should be mobilized against schemes which introduce flexi-time on the employers' terms.

One thousand hours per year could, for example, be divided into twenty per week, done in two and a half days, or ten days per month, or twenty-five weeks per year, or ten months spread out over two years - without any loss of real income of course (I shall return to this). Working hours could also be defined as the amount of work performed over a lifetime: for example, a person could do 20,000 to 30,000 hours over a lifetime, which would be completed within the fifty years of their potential active working life and guarantee them - throughout their lifetime - the full income which their 1,600 hours per year provides at the present time.

A form of self-management such as this which spans an entire lifetime presents a number of advantages and has been the subject of much debate in Sweden. By allowing people to work more or less during certain periods in their lives, this arrangement allows them to be ahead or behind in the amount of work they have to do *per year*; to interrupt their professional activity over a number of months or years *without loss of income* in order, for example, to learn a new trade, set up a business, bring up children, build a house, or undertake an artistic, scientific, humanitarian or co-operative project.

The possibility of alternating between waged work and autonomous activities, or doing the two simultaneously, should not be interpreted as a devaluation of waged work. Personal development through autonomous activities always has repercussions on one's professional work. It enriches it and makes it more fruitful. The notion that one must devote oneself and one's time entirely and exclusively to a single job if one is to succeed or be creative is erroneous. The creator and the pioneer are generally jacks-of-all-trades with extremely diverse and changing interests and occupations. Einstein's theory of relativity came to him during the free time he had while working full-time job in the patent office in Berne.

In general, innovation and creativity are the result not of continuous, regular work but of a period of spasmodic effort (for example, twenty hours or more at a stretch in computer programming; three hundred to five hundred hours a month, over a period of several months, to set up a business or perfect a new type of technology or piece of equipment), followed by periods of reading, thinking, pottering about, travelling and emotional and intellectual interaction.

Continual hard slog does not make work more creative or more efficient; it only serves the will to power of those who defend the rank and the position of strength their work affords them. It is rare for pioneers, creators or high-level researchers to be *at work* for more than 1,000 hours per year on average. Experience has shown that two people, sharing a single position of responsibility (for example, as a dean of a university, a personnel manager, a legal adviser, a municipal architect or a doctor) and doing two and a half days each, do the job better more efficiently than one person doing the same job full-time.

3.3.3 *The democratization of areas of competence*

A policy for the reduction of working time limited solely to unskilled jobs will not avoid the division and segmentation of society it is designed precisely to prevent. All it will do is displace the split. It will give rise on one side to professional elites who monopolize the positions of responsibility and power and on the other to a mass of powerless deskilled, peripheral workers on short time. If the maximum number of people are to have access to creative, responsible, skilled jobs, then it is just as essential for the amount of working hours to be reduced here as elsewhere. The current scarcity of jobs such as these can be explained less by a lack of talents and will to develop a career than by the fact that creative, responsible, skilled jobs are monopolized by professional elites intent on defending their corporate and class privileges and powers. Reducing the amount of time work takes up will enable these jobs to be 'democratized' and allow a larger percentage of the working population to have access to them, since it will create scope for people to acquire new skills and to study regardless of age.

AN INCOME UNCOUPLED FROM THE QUANTITY OF LABOUR PERFORMED

When the economy requires a decreasing amount of labour and distributes less and less in the way of wages for an increasing volume of production, 'the purchasing power of the population and their right to an income can no longer be made to depend on the amount of labour they supply. The purchasing power distributed must increase despite the reduction in the amount of labour required. The level of real income distributed and the quantity of labour supplied must become independent of each other, otherwise the demand for production will be insufficient and economic depression will deepen. The key question for all the industrial nations is not the principle of uncoupling the level of income from the amount of labour the economy requires, but the way in which to implement this dissociation. Three formulas can be envisaged.

4.1. The Social-Democratic Logic

The creation of jobs outside the economy proper is often advocated, especially by the left, on the grounds that 'There is no shortage of work, since there is virtually no limit to the needs we have to satisfy.' The question remains, however, as to whether these needs will be best satisfied through the waged labour of people employed to that end. Two categories of inherently non-commercializable needs can be distinguished.

- The first group relates to the environment on which our quality of life depends, and includes our need for space, clean air, silence and styles of architecture and urban planning which make it easy for us to meet and interact. These needs cannot be expressed on the market in terms of effective individual 'demand' giving rise to a corresponding supply. The resources to which these needs relate cannot in fact be produced and sold, whatever the price offered for them. These needs will be satisfied not by working and producing more but by working and producing differently. To this end, a policy of selective public incentives and subsidies is required so as to express a collective level of demand which would make it possible to furnish the corresponding supply (especially in the case of re-forestation, pollution control, energy conservation, urban development or the prevention of illnesses, for example). This will create a limited number of jobs. But part of the jobs thus created will be lost elsewhere because the consumption of energy, medical services and pharmaceutical products will diminish, as will the demand for goods and services, since jobs created by public demand are financed from public, fiscal resources drawn from the economy.

- The second category of non-economic needs which cannot be expressed in cash terms concerns helping and caring activities (for the aged, the disturbed, children, the sick, and so on). Industrialization has resulted in a shortage of time and autonomy, and its growth has been based on compensating for this by turning activities which were traditionally part of the private, family or community sphere into professional, commercialized ones. This has resulted in the impoverishment and depersonalization of human relations, the disintegration of grassroots communities and the standardization and technicization of caring and helping services - all things which the new social movements' are reacting against at different levels. We must consequently ask ourselves to what extent our need for the care and help provided for by these services, whether public or private, is generated by our *lack of time*; to what extent, therefore, that need would not be better met if we increased the time we had available rather than employing people to take care of our children, ageing parents, mixed-up adolescents and distressed friends in our stead. A reduction in working hours without loss of income could allow the repatriation to grassroots communities, through voluntary cooperation and mutual aid on the level of the neighbourhood or block, of a growing number of services which will better satisfy our needs, and be better adapted to them, if we provide them for ourselves than they are when professionals are paid to administer them according to norms and procedures laid down by the state. It is not a question of dismantling the welfare state but of relieving it, as the amount of work we do for economic ends diminishes, of certain tasks which, apart from being expensive, also bring the tutelage of the state to bear on the beneficiaries.

4.2. The Liberal Logic

The second formula for uncoupling the level of income from the amount of labour supplied is the institution of a `social minimum' or `social income' unconditionally guaranteed to all citizens. This formula has its supporters on the left as well as on the Right. In general, its objective is to protect an increasing mass of unemployed people from extreme forms of poverty. In the most generous variants of this scheme, the social income guaranteed to all citizens is to be fixed above the poverty line.

The neo-liberal variant, however, fixes the guaranteed social income at or below subsistence level, with the result that the recipients are practically forced to earn a top-up income by doing `odd jobs', which will not prevent them receiving the guaranteed minimum income as long as their earned income does not exceed a certain amount. In this conception of the scheme, the guaranteed minimum is to allow the price of labour to change in keeping with the laws of supply and demand and, if necessary, to fall below subsistence level.

In all of the above cases, the guaranteed social income is essentially an *unemployment allowance* adapted to a situation in which a high percentage of the unemployed have never worked and have little chance of finding a regular paid job. It amounts to a form of social assistance provided by the state, which neither stems the tide of unemployment nor arrests the division of society into a class of active workers in full-time employment on the one hand and a marginalized mass of the unemployed and semi-employed on the other.

4.3. The Trade-Union Logic

The third formula for making the level of income independent of the amount of labour supplied is the reduction of working hours without loss of income. This proposal reconciles the right of everyone to have a paid job and the possibility for everyone to have a greater degree of existential autonomy and for individuals to exercise more control over their private, family and community lives. This proposal is most closely in keeping with the trade-union tradition. While the demand for a guaranteed social income is a *social policy* demand addressed to the state, and one which trade unions can neither carry through by direct mass action nor implement themselves through workers' control, the demand for a reduction in the working week to thirty-two, twenty-eight, twenty-four or twenty hours, without loss of real income, can be campaigned for through collective action and, more importantly, can create solidarity between workers, the unemployed and those people - a significant number of whom are women and young people - who wish their jobs to fit into their personal lives instead of requiring the sacrifice of the latter.

Contrary to the social income, which is a more or less inadequate compensation for social and economic exclusion, a reduction in working hours meets three basic requisites of justice:

- the savings in labour which technological development has created must benefit everyone;
- everyone must be able to work less so that everyone can work;
- the decrease in working hours must not entail a decrease in real income, since more wealth is being created by less labour.

These are not new aims. There is no shortage of collective agreements, and sectoral or company agreements which have, in the past, made provision for a progressive reduction in working hours accompanied by guarantees of purchasing power and a stabilization, if not indeed an increase, in the size of the workforce.

What is new is the fact that the technological revolution is now affecting all fields of activity and bringing about highly differentiated savings in labour. This will continue over a long period. Trade-union action is indispensable if we are to achieve reductions in working hours which correspond to the predictable rise in productivity: indispensable, in particular, if the reductions in working hours are to lead to employees being able to *self-manage their time* and not merely to more flexible-time on the employers' terms. But trade-union activity is *not enough* to effect a planned reduction in working hours by stages across the whole of society. This calls for specific policies which very much concern the trade-union movement but which cannot be conducted and implemented by it. These specific policies must focus on four areas: forecasting and programming; employment; training; and financing.

4.4. Complementary Policies

4.4.1. *Productivity contracts*

Increases in productivity are neither unpredictable nor unforeseen. Enterprises, industrial sectors and administrative bodies generally plan investment programmes spanning several years which are intended to produce predictable productivity gains. Social control over the technological revolution consists in translating these productivity forecasts into for example, company, sectoral or public-service contracts, which can serve as a framework for ongoing negotiations and necessary adjustments and means of implementation.

4.4.2. *Employment policy*

Increases in *available* productivity are obviously not the same in all companies, sectors and institutions. Social control over the technological revolution consists in avoiding a situation in which there are redundancies and a surplus of labour

power in some sectors of the economy, while there is plenty of overtime and a shortage of labour in others.

It thus becomes essential for labour to be transferred from enterprises and industrial sectors in which there is rapid growth in available productivity to those where there is little or no growth. Such transfers are the condition for an approximately equal reduction in working hours for everyone, proportionate to the *average* growth in productivity of the economy as a whole, in conditions as close as possible to full employment. An employment policy which offers incentives for professional mobility is therefore necessary. This evidently presupposes the possibility of learning or relearning a trade at any age, without loss of income.

4.4.3. *Educational reform*

Current training methods are often inappropriate and not particularly stimulating. There is an urgent need at all levels of the education system for a reform which will focus on the individual's ability to learn by her or himself, on the acquisition of a range of related skills which will enable individuals to become polyvalent and develop their capacity to carry out a range of occupations. Schools also need to reverse their priorities: instead of giving priority to training 'human computers' whose memory capacity, abilities of analysis and calculation and so on, are surpassed and largely made redundant by electronic computers, they need to give priority to developing irreplaceable human capabilities such as manual, artistic, emotional, relational and moral capabilities, and the ability to ask unforeseen questions, to search for a meaning, to reject non-sense even when it is logically coherent.

4.4.4. *Fiscal reform*

From the point where it takes only 1,000 hours per year or 20,000 to 30,000 hours per lifetime to create an amount of wealth equal to or greater than the amount we create at the present time in 1,600 hours per year or 40,000 to 50,000 hours in a working life, we must all be able to obtain a real income equal to or higher than our current salaries in exchange for a greatly reduced quantity of work. In practice, this means that in the future we must receive our full monthly income every month even if we work full-time only one month in every two or six months in a year or even two years out of four, so as to complete a personal, family or community project, or experiment with different lifestyles, just as we now receive our full salaries during paid holidays, training courses, possibly during periods of sabbatical leave, and so forth.

In contrast to the guaranteed social minimum granted by the state to those unable to find regular paid work, our regular monthly income will be the normal remuneration we have earned by performing the normal amount of labour the economy requires each individual to supply. The fact that the amount of labour required is so low that work can become intermittent and constitute an activity

amongst a number of others, should not be an obstacle to its being remunerated by a full monthly income throughout one's life. This income corresponds to the portion of socially produced wealth to which each individual is entitled by virtue to their participation in the social process of production. It is, however, no longer a true salary, since it is not dependent on the amount of labour supplied (in the month or year) and is not intended to remunerate individuals as workers. It is therefore practically impossible for this income to be paid and guaranteed by economic units or enterprises, either in the form of increases in salary per hour of work or through contributions paid into a social fund. In both cases, the reduction by half of working hours, without loss of real income, would raise the hourly cost of labour to double the present level.

Leaving aside problems of competitiveness, the result would be a prohibitive rise in the *relative price* of highly labour-intensive services and forms of production such as building, agriculture, maintenance and repair work, and cultural and educational activities. This difficulty could be overcome by implementing the following solution: enterprises would only pay for the hours of work completed, on a negotiated wage-scale, which would thus ensure that the real costs of production were known. The loss of salary resulting from a reduction in working hours would be compensated from a guarantee fund which would pay for the working hours saved due to advances in technology, at the rate set for hours of work actually completed. This guarantee fund would be paid for out of a tax on automated production, comparable to VAT or the duty on alcohol, cigarettes, fuel or cars, for example. The rate of taxation of products would rise as their production costs decreased. The less socially desirable or useful that production, the higher this tax would be. As these taxes would be deductible from export costs, competitiveness would not be affected. The real income individuals receive would be made up of a direct salary and a social income which, in non-working periods in particular, would itself be sufficient to guarantee their normal standard of living.

The implementation of a system of political prices, reflecting the choices society has made, and the creation of a social income independent of the amount of labour supplied, will in any case become necessary as the cost of labour in increasingly widespread robotized production is reduced to a negligible amount. The value of salaries distributed and the price of automated forms of production can only be prevented from falling through the floor by a price-and-incomes policy by means of which society can assert its priorities and give direction and meaning to the advance of technology. Nevertheless, there is nothing to guarantee that society will choose the emancipation and autonomy of individuals as its priority or its intended direction, rather than seeking to dominate and exert even greater control over them. What direction the present social changes will take is still an open question; it is today and will, for the foreseeable future remain, the central issue in social conflicts and the key question for social movements.

CONCLUSION

I have attempted to identify the meaning history *could* have, and to show what humanity and the trade-union movement could derive from the technological revolution we are witnessing at present. I have tried to indicate the direction in which we should advance, the policies we should follow if we are to bring this about. Events could nevertheless take a course which would miss the possible meaning of the current technological revolution. If this happens, I can see no other meaning in that revolution: our societies will continue to disintegrate, to become segmented, to sink into violence, injustice and fear.